

# I. INTRODUCTION

## BACKGROUND

The Parker River/Essex Bay Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), designated in 1979 by the Massachusetts Secretary of Environmental Affairs, contains 25,500 acres of estuarine, riverine, salt marsh, and barrier beach ecosystems within the municipalities of Newbury, Rowley, Ipswich, Essex, and Gloucester (Figure 1). The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management (DEM) administers the ACEC Program and coordinates closely with the Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management (CZM) regarding all coastal ACECs. The ACEC designation encourages coordination of local, regional, state, and federal agencies and organizations to preserve, restore, and enhance resources of this area. Projects within the ACEC boundary require higher environmental standards and review through the existing state environmental regulatory framework, including the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA), the Waterways Regulations (Chapter 91), the Wetlands Protection Act, the Solid Waste Facilities Site Assignment Regulations, and CZM policies.

Local governments are not required to establish and implement new regulations or policies to address impacts on ACEC resources. However, ecological, economic, and recreational interests in the ACEC and issues including loss of open space, salt marsh degradation, and water pollution can effectively be addressed through local bylaws and regulations. This assessment highlights both regulatory and nonregulatory approaches that ACEC stewards can consider to improve natural resource management in their communities.

Since "one size does not fit all" when it comes to developing strategies for resource management, there is need for creative approaches and partnerships to effectively address issues in ACEC communities. Fortunately, many partners in the region (Appendix A) are committed to developing flexible programs and to working with local officials and volunteers to provide technical assistance. By working together, local and regional partners can promote a strong network of support for resource protection, access a broader range of regional funding sources, and draw on expertise from diverse organizations working to protect the natural environment. This assessment highlights case studies and actions that these partners can consider to further their goals of resource management. Ultimately, collaborative efforts will broaden the network of North Shore organizations working to protect this unique area.

## DESCRIPTION OF STUDY

Assessing local and regional resource management strategies is one step towards improving ACEC stewardship efforts. This document presents the results of an assessment conducted for the Parker River/Essex Bay ACEC in Winter, 2000 and is intended to serve as an information link among the five municipalities and partners working throughout the ACEC. The report is targeted to those who make and implement policy decisions through bylaws and regulations, as well as those who use nonregulatory approaches for natural resource protection.

This document has four main objectives:

- 1) identify priority natural resource issues in the ACEC region and

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- the five municipalities;
- 2) document existing regulatory and nonregulatory strategies for natural resource protection in the five ACEC municipalities (Appendix B);
  - 3) highlight innovative approaches and transferable case studies to help address resource issues; and
  - 4) identify local and regional management strategies to address environmental concerns.

These objectives were accomplished by reviewing existing local zoning bylaws, planning board rules and regulations, and wetland bylaws (Appendix B) and by interviewing local boards, commissions, and departments within the five municipalities, as well as some staff from regional organizations (see Appendix C for a list of interview questions). Their anecdotal accounts of both the regulatory and nonregulatory framework and their identification of issues and case studies comprise the majority of this report.

To begin, an overview of the natural resource issues within the Parker River/Essex Bay ACEC is presented. A brief summary of each municipality's primary resource concerns as articulated in local interviews follows. The next section highlights particular case studies as examples of successful strategies that other towns, agencies, and organizations might consider if they have not yet taken such action. Case studies include growth management techniques, approaches for acquiring and protecting land, nonregulatory mechanisms for reducing stormwater discharge, strategies for water conservation, and ways to strengthen wetlands bylaws and regulations. The final section identifies strategies for action, as offered both by local officials and CZM staff.



Figure 1. Parker River/Essex Bay ACEC boundary